FORTY-TWO

# FABLES OF LA FONTAINE

TRANSLATED BY EDWARD MARSH

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# OF
# LA FONTAINE

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TRANSLATED BY

EDWARD MARSH

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# FORTY-TWO
# FABLES OF LA FONTAINE

## THE ILL-ASSORTED COUPLE

(VII. 2)

*To H. L.*

IF Beauty were with Goodness always mated,
I'd seek a wife without a day's delay ;
But since, in fact, they're mostly separated,
And rarely doth a lovely face
Harbour a soul of equal grace,
Excuse me, if I take no steps that way.
Many the marriages I've seen, but none
I've envied ; yet, of five men, four will run
The risk, and try the bold experiment ;
And of the five, four, soon or late, repent.



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One husband, having found repentance,
Saw nothing for it but to sentence
His wife to exile. She was a real shrew,
Nagging, and jealous, and a screw.
All but herself were always in the wrong,
They went to bed too soon, they slept too long,
Their white was black, their black was white,
And nothing in the house was right.
The servants were in mutiny,
The master's life a purgatory,
Hearing of nothing, day or night,
Except his want of common sense,
His restlessness, his indolence,
His wastefulness, his appetite—
In short, she led him such a dance
That, tired of listening to a fury,
He sent her packing in a hurry
To the remotest part of France,
Where her old home was situated.
Behold my lady rusticated
Among the farmyard sounds and stenches,
Companioned by the country wenches
Who mind the turkey-cocks and hens,
And captivate the country swains
Who mind the pigs and mind the sows.
After a lapse of time, her spouse,
Building upon these mellowing influences,
Recalled her to their Paris house,

And questioned her on her experiences.
" How did you like the simple life ? " he asks.
" Oh, well enough ; but what I couldn't bear
Was seeing those hands so slack about their tasks.
They never give the flocks a thought,
Or do a single thing they ought—
Worse even than these wretched servants here.
I told them what I thought of them—but there !
I only got myself disliked. . . ." " My dear,"
Broke in the husband, " if you are so curst
That those who only see you first
Thing in the morning and last thing at night
Can barely stand you in their sight,
What can poor footmen do, who all day long
Can find no shelter from your raging tongue ?
And as for me, what can your husband do,
Boxed up with you all day and all night too ?
Off to the farm you go, and never
Darken my door again. Should ever
The wish to take you back ev'n cross my mind,
'Twould serve me right in the next world to find,
Always beside me, not one wife but two,
And both of 'em like you."

## THE RAT AND THE OYSTER

(VIII. 9)

*To J. T.*

A RAT, whose brain was not his strongest point,
Woke up one day to find himself grown weary
Of his home-life, which seemed all out of joint :
The field, the crops, were suddenly so dreary
That he resolved to bid them all good-bye.
He ran a yard or two, then looked about,
And viewed the landscape with a novel eye.
" How vast and grand the world is ! Why,
" Those are the Alps," you might have heard him shout,
" And that the Caucasus, no doubt ! "
(He took each molehill for an Everest—
But, as I said, he wasn't of the cleverest.)
After some days he reached a spot
Where the out-tide had left a lot
Of oysters stranded on the shore,
Which he mistook at first for men-of-war.
" My dad," thought he, " was a poor timid creature,
He dared not travel, and knew nought of Nature ;
While *I* have faced the Ocean without shrinking,
And crossed the wide Sahara without drinking."*
(He had picked up a few quotations,
And brought them in, like this, at random,
But didn't really understand 'em ;

*From Rabelais.

Those rats he did not emulate
Who with such exemplary patience
Whole libraries assimilate.)
Most of the shells were closed, but one
Lay open, drinking in the sun,
Fanned by an air that breathed delight,
Basking in soft abandonment,
So round, so fat, so fresh, so white,
So obviously succulent.
" Ha ! " cries the Rat, in rapt astonishment,
" There's something here that tempts my appetite.
If I can trust the colour and the smell,
I've never in my life dined half so well."
In these high hopes he nears the shell,
Stretches his neck and pokes it in,
When, snap ! the Oyster, like a gin,
Brings down her lid—the rat is caught :
And all for want of being properly taught.

This tale conveys two lessons—one,
That an untutored mind is prone
To admiration of th' unknown ;
The second—you have heard of it
Before, for 'tis *The Biter Bit*.

(VI. 21)

*To E. K.*

WHEN husbands die, widows must sigh.
There's a loud burst of grief at first,
But resignation follows after ;
Let Time but fly, the tears go dry,
And on Time's wing come jest and laughter.
Between the widow of to-day
And the same widow a year hence,
There's a surprising difference ;
You can't believe that she's the same.
At first you want to run away ;
But in twelve months the lively dame
Has all her charms in fresh array.
It's an invariable game ;
For inconsolability
Is seldom what it claims to be,
And this my tale does but exemplify
What fact makes plain to every seeing eye.

The husband of a youthful beauty
Was setting sail for the next life.
" O wait for me ! " implored his wife,
" I'll follow you in joyful duty,
Let but my willing soul take wing with yours."

Alone, the husband left these earthly shores.

The lady's father was a man of sense,
Ripened by wide experience.
He let her give her grief its head.
After a time, " My love," he said,
" Your tears have surely flowed too long,
And such protracted grief is wrong.
I know—of course—you're broken-hearted,
But will it help our dear departed
To drown your charms ? Take heart again,
The world is full of living men
More worth attention than the dead.
I wouldn't urge undue dispatch
To find yourself a better match,
And jump from woe to festival—
Leave it to me, and I'll produce,
After a fitting interval,
Some handsome suitor, young and brave.
And—well, a different pair of shoes
From the defunct." " Alas ! " cried she,
My heart is buried in the grave,
My only spouse a nunnery."
On this he left her to digest her sorrow.
Just like the month before the next month passed.
The next, some little change appears each morrow
In gown, or hair, or linen, till at last
Her weeds are almost as becoming
As what she'll wear when they are cast.
Now the whole flock of rosy Loves fly homing

Back to the dovecote—in a little while
She has all her charms again, dance, jest, and smile,
And in the waters of delight
She bathes by day and bathes by night.
Her father, conscious that the darling dead
Had ceased to be a danger, held his tongue ;
Till, vexed that he should make her wait so long,
" Where's that young man you promised me ? " she said.

(IV. 5)

*To Ivor Novello*

To ape a gift we don't possess
Can only end in clumsiness.
A boor may strive as best he can,
He'll never be a gentleman.
Each here and there, and every now and then,
Some being is born into the world of men
To whom, spoilt darling of high Heaven,
The magic grace of charm is given.
'Tis well to leave it to them—those who try
To invade their exquisite monopoly
Will put the cap on when they grasp my moral,
Drawn from a too ambitious Donkey,
Who pitched his singing in a wrong key.

An Ass was musing on a quarrel
He had with life. " That little Dog," thought he,
Because, forsooth, his ways are so bewitching,
Is treated like the family,
And lives in ease and luxury,
While I get nothing but a switching.
I never, personally, saw
Much in him : he just gives his paw,
And then lets out a little yap,
And everybody starts to clap

And pass him round from lap to lap.
I can't see why I shouldn't do
The like, and get some spoiling too."
The plan was well worth putting to the proof.
Seeing his Master sweetly slumbering,
Up to his chair the Ass goes lumbering,
Raises a hard and shabby hoof,
And archly pats him on the chin,
Enhancing the audacious action
With bursts of his own tuneful din.
" Oh ! " cried his lord in stupefaction,
" Such a caress and such a song
I never knew my whole life long !
Martin, here's someone wants a whacking."
Martin ran up, and started thwacking.
From that day forth our hero was
A sadder and a wiser Ass.

## THE FISHES AND THE FLUTE-PLAYER

(X. 11)

*To A. I.*

THE Shepherd Thyrsis wooed Annette
With music of his flute and voice
So beautiful that hearing it
The souls in Hades might rejoice.
One day he sang upon the bank
Of a fair stream which ran through meadows
Where Zephyr o'er the flowers chased the shadows:
And while the singing rose and sank,
Annette sat fishing by his side—
But past the bait the victims glide,
And still no capture crowns her wishes.
Thyrsis, who by his tuneful art
Had melted many a ruthless heart,
Thought, but thought wrongly, 'twould attract the fishes.
"O citizens of this pure wave," sang he,
Come, leave your Naiad in her watery chamber,
And swimming up through green and amber
Behold a goddess lovelier far than she.
Fear not to enter her captivity;
Towards men alone her heart is hard;
You will be nourished tenderly,
And not one silver scale be marred.
Against your life she harbours no design;
A globe awaits you, clear as crystal fine;

And ev'n though two or three should die,
In Anne's white arms one moment they would lie,
And I should wish their lot were mine."
The speech was eloquent in form and matter,
But nothing could have fallen flatter :
The audience was no less deaf than dumb,
The stream undimpled lay, untwitched the line,
And not a single fish would come.
When his last lovely note had died unheeded,
It struck him that a net was what he needed.
He fetched a large one. In a minute
Every single fish was in it ;
The next, laid out in order neat
At the fair Shepherdess' feet.

Oh Shepherds, ye whose flocks are men, not sheep !
Kings, who by reason hope to win and keep
Th' allegiance of an alien population !
That never was the way to set
About your task—so try a net.
Force is your tool, not self-determination.

(VIII. I)

*To Robert Bridges*

ONCE on a time that fearful visitation
Which Heaven in righteous indignation
Sends on the earth to avenge its outraged law,
The Plague (for I must write the hideous word)
Which in one day can glut black Pluto's maw,
Made onset upon beast and bird.
Though all died not, yet all were smitten ; none
Was left with strength to carry on
The business of a life so near to death ;
No food could rouse their appetite ;
The wolves, the foxes, had no breath
To chase their gentle victims in their flight ;
The very doves fled one another's sight ;
Love perished, and along with love, delight.
King Lion called a Council. " Friends," said he,
" 'Tis plain this agony must be
God's punishment for some portentous crime.
'Tis therefore meet the guiltiest should fall
A sacrifice to appease that wrath sublime,
And thus, maybe, obtain new health for all.
My reading shows that such propitiations
Are frequent in the history of nations.
So now 'tis time in scrupulous sincerity
To probe our consciences with strict severity.

And first Myself. I fear I am a glutton,
And many an innocent sheep has been my mutton.
Indeed, 'tis not unknown for me to chew
The shepherd too.
I'm ready, then, if need must be ; but first
Let us make sure which really is the worst ;
For 'tis but justice that the doom should fall
Upon the blackest criminal."

" Sire," said the Fox, " a King can be too good ;
Such scruples show too delicate a nature.
Why, what's a sheep—that dull, plebeian creature ?
Is it a sin to use her flesh for food ?
Nay, 'twas an honour for the trash
To make your Majesty a mash.
As for the shepherd, sure 'tis plain that he
Deserved to pay the heaviest penalty,
As one of those who on our ill-used races
Usurp a power which has no genuine basis."

The Fox sat down amid prolonged applause.
'Twas felt that it would be unwise
Too rigidly to scrutinize
What tiger, bear, and other dignitaries
Had done in violation of the laws ;
And all the touchy beasts with teeth and claws,
Down to the dog, were lauded to the skies.

All these disposed of, came the Ass.
" One day I recollect," said he,
" Pacing a field hard by a nunnery.

Hunger, the chance, the freshness of the grass,
And I suppose the Devil, tempted me
To crop some blades, enough to cool my tongue ;
Though, truth to tell, I knew that it was wrong."
Thereat an uproar rose against the donkey.
A smart half-educated monkey
Proved in a speech chock-full of legal patter
That 'twas from this vile wretch, this mangy scum,
That all the evils of the time had come.
His trifling fault was judged a hanging matter.
What, eat one's neighbour's grass ! the gravity
Of the offence denoted sheer depravity.
Nothing but death could purge such foul pollution.
The Ass was haled away to execution.

At Court, the difference between right and wrong
Depends on whether you are weak or strong.

(VIII. 12)

*To Mrs. J. H. Thomas*

A GOAT, a Sheep, and a Prize Pig,
Packed close together in their gig—
Or cart—were driving to the fair.
'Twas not amusement led them there ;
It wasn't the idea at all
To take them to the music-hall ;
They were for sale, to tell you true.
And Master Pig, he squawls and squeals
As if he had ten butchers at his heels.
'Twas simply deafening. The other two,
Good easy folk, who saw no cause for dread,
Or what the rout was all about,
Wondered that he should shriek and shout
And raise a din to rouse the dead.
" Be quiet, Sir," the Carter said,
" And let us hear each other speak.
What ails you, pray, to squawk and squeak ?
These friends of yours, so calm and meek,
Are infinitely better bred.
'Tis they should teach you manners, or at least
To hold your tongue. See how this gentle beast,
Sir Sheep, sits mumchance. That's what I call sense."
" Then it's what I call dense,"
Replied the Porker. " If he knew what's what,

He'd baa his head off ; and your other sample
Of breeding, if she realized her lot,
Would quickly follow my example,
And bleat her gullet sore ; but she's a fool,
And so is he ; they both suppose
Their only danger is to lose,
The Goat her milk, the Sheep his wool.
For aught I know, they may be right ;
But I, who only furnish bacon,
Can be quite sure I'm not mistaken
In thinking I shall die to-night.
Farewell my wife, farewell my sty,
My old ancestral home, good-bye ! "

It was a subtle ratiocination,
But profitless. We have our destinies,
Not to be changed by fear or lamentation,
And he's the wisest who the least foresees.

(VII. 5)

*To I. P.*

'T I S well to be particular ;
But one may carry it too far.

A certain girl set out to find
A husband wholly to her mind.
He must be handsome, charming, young, well-made,
Well-born, rich, clever, and (though I'm afraid
This combination is a rarity)
Ardent, yet not inclined to jealousy—
Perfection, in a word ; but that's a dream !
Fate did its best for her ; a constant stream
Of the most eligible men
Turned up, and were turned down again.
She found them quite inadequate,
And pitifully second-rate.
" What, *them ?* For *me ?* You can't be serious !
Such things as those ? It's most mysterious
That friends of mine should think they'd do.
I never dreamt of such a crew."
One of them showed no delicacy of mind,
Another had a quite impossible nose,
'Twas this, 'twas that, 'twas everything. Poor beaus !
What faults these exquisites will find,
In their contempt for human kind !

She'd no more marry them than fly.

The brilliant matches thus rejected,
The second-best took turns to try.
She laughed. " Well, this is unexpected !
I'm too good-natured, otherwise
I shouldn't let them past my gates.
They must suppose I'm in sad straits
To think that I should cast my eyes
On such a catalogue of guys.
Thank God, I need no company
To get a good night's rest, not I ! "

With thoughts like these she satisfied her mind ;
But suddenly she found herself alone.
Time touched her, and the lovers all were gone,
And she was left, an ageing wreck, behind.
For the first year or two, anxiety
Was all she felt ; but then there came alarm.
Each day she missed some dear familiar charm,
Her little ways lost their felicity,
Her laughter changed its tone,
And last, she knew that Love himself was flown.
Next, a shocked look came into people's eyes
When they met hers ; next, paint-boxes and dyes . . .
Poor woman ! There's no help in palliatives
'Gainst Time, the Thief of Thieves.
A ruined house you can replace ;

Why, oh why not a ruined face ?
" Quick, take a husband," said her looking-glass ;
Some hidden passion urged the same behest,
(For Passion pricks the most exclusive breast) ;
And so th' incredible came to pass :
Our heroine, content and even glad
To marry a notorious cad.

## THE COCK AND THE FOX

(II. 15)

*To Mrs. Winston Churchill*

An old Cock, full of nous and guile,
Perched on a branch, was keeping guard awhile.
Up came a Fox, and with an unctuous voice
And holy grin, bade him rejoice.
Said he, " I bring good tidings, brother !
This blessed day our quarrels cease,
And there is universal peace.
Come down, we must embrace each other.
(Don't keep me waiting, sir, I pray ;
I've still ten urgent calls to pay.)
Henceforward you and all your friends
Can prosecute your private ends
Free from the fear of molestation
By us, your allies from to-day.
To-night there's an illumination ;
Meanwhile come down, and on each cheek
Receive a brotherly salute."
" Friend," said the Cock, " I could not seek
To taste a joy more absolute
Than news like yours ; and 'tis a boon still rarer
That you should be the bearer.
But look ! I see two basset hounds
Approaching us by leaps and bounds—
On the same errand, sure enough—

They're almost here. I'll join you on the ground,
And then the four of us can kiss all round."
" Well," said the Fox, " I must be off.
I've far to run, and it grows late.
We'll meet again to celebrate
Th' occasion at some future date."
So saying, he sprinted up the hill,
Vexed that his ruse turned out so ill,
And left th' old Cock to chuckle at his leisure.

To trick the trickster is a double pleasure.

## THE FROG AND THE OX

(I. 3)

*To J. H.*

A FROG upon an Ox once cast her eyes,
And thought him the ideal of shape and size ;
So, being about the bigness of an egg,
She needs must swell, and strain, and pant, and puff,
In emulation of his fine proportions ;
Saying " Look, sister dear, I beg,
How am I getting on ? Is that enough ? "
" Not yet." " Then this ? " " Scarce better than at first."
" But now ? " " So far, dear, that's your worst."
Alas, the end of her contortions
Was that the tiny creature burst.

The world is full of nonsense much like hers
Each cit must have a mansion like a lord,
Each petty prince must be ambassadored,
Each marquis have his train of followers.

## THE HAG AND THE SLAVIES

(v. 6)

*To K. L.*

THERE was a Hag who had two Chambermaids.
They spun so well that the Three Sister Spinners,
Compared with them, were bunglers and beginners.
Her only study was to give them work.
The moment Phœbus chased the eastern shades,
Up wheels, up distaffs, spin, spin, spin,
Morning out and evening in,
She kept 'em at it like a Turk.
The moment Eos raised her golden head,
A shabby cock would crow his warning note :
The Dame, still shabbier, from her pallet leaping,
Would huddle on a greasy petticoat,
Light a cracked lamp, and scurry to the bed
Where the poor slaves with all their might
Were fiercely, ravenously sleeping.
One stretched an arm, one opened half an eye,
And both with concentrated spite
Swore through their teeth that the damned cock should die.
No sooner said than done—that wheezy crow
Was stilled ; but did the murderers profit ? No—
The Hag became her own alarum,
And lest the hour should pass her by,
Now started bustling harum-scarum

Almost before the pair had closed an eye.

Often a struggle to escape
But lands us in a still worse scrape :
To exchange the cock for old Sibylla
Was *From Charybdis into Scylla.*

(VII. 7)

*To Constance Collier.*

KING LION wished one day to ascertain
The sum of nations peopling his domain.
He therefore sent throughout the land
An order, under his own hand
And seal, to fix a date when all
The vassal creatures, great and small,
Should muster at the capital,
Where for a month His Majesty,
Would hold his court in ceremony,
The programme opening with a sumptuous beano,
Including an appearance of Dan Leno—
(By this engagement, made at vast expense,
The Prince gave proof of his magnificence.)
The guests were met in the resort
Which served him as a Hampton Court,
In other words the Lion's Den—
It was a charnel of slain beasts and men!
Slap in your face the stench arose.
"Faugh!" said the Bear, and stopped his nose.
'Twas a mistake; the Sovereign with a shout
Sent him to Hades, where no doubt
They'd give him something to be dainty about.

The Monkey burst into applause.

" O sovereign rage," he cried, " O princely claws !
O spacious cave ! O perfume ! ambergris
Or rose were garlic after this ! "
Another error, though the opposite ;
(For flattery can miss as well as hit,)
And, like the Bear, he paid for it—
This King was quite the Roman Emperor !
Caligula himself could do no more.
    It chanced the Fox was standing by :
The genial Monarch caught his eye.
" Now then ! " said he, " which is it, scent or stink ?
Please say exactly what you think."
The Fox evaded a direct reply ;
He'd a bad cold, and couldn't smell, said he.
That was the line to take—he went scot-free.

Reader, when to Court you go,
Avoid insipid flattery
As well as blunt sincerity ;
And never answer Yes or No.

(VIII. 15)

*To Viola Tree*

As a large Elephant went rolling by,
A small Rat watched him with satiric eye.
He thought it an absurdity
To be so huge, so slow, so black,
And have such a contraption on one's back.
In triple tier the monster bore
The Sultaness of Mogador,
And all her household stage by stage,
Her cat, her dog, her cockatoo,
Her wench, her hag, her eunuch too,
Bound on her yearly pilgrimage.
His Ratship wondered that the human race
Should be so much impressed by size ;
" As if," thought he, " a creature's rank and place
Were solely measured in their eyes
By the amount of room he occupies !
What can you men admire in that mere hulk,
Which frightens children by its clumsy bulk ?
I'd have you know, though small we be,
We think ourselves at least as good as he."
He was continuing upon this tack,
When the cat, leaping from the monster's back,
Taught him too late this truth significant :
*A Rat is not an Elephant.*

## THE TWO COCKS

(VII. 13)

*To Marie Belloc-Lowndes*

T w o Cocks were friends : between them came a Hen :
They fought. 'Twas Love at his old tricks again,
The same which laid proud Ilium low,
And lit the feud which made Scamander flow
Red with the blood of Gods and men.
Our Cocks fought long their quarrel to decide ;
The rumour spread abroad ; from far and wide
The crested race came running to the show.
Helens enough, bright-feathered and bright-eyed,
Smiled on the conqueror ; the loser fled,
In a safe roost near by to hide his head,
And brood on fame and love, both lost.
Each day he watched his rival boast
In triumph and possession : 'twas a sight
To keep his courage and his hate alight.
He files his beak, and flaps his wings,
And swells his breast against the breeze,
Developing his faculties
By a full course of physical culture
To fit himself for better things.
His pains were thrown away. A vulture
Remarked the victor perching on a stack
For one more crow, and swooped upon his back.
The cruel claw brought all that pride to zero.

Thus by a strange reverse our hero,
Free to emerge from his retreat,
With crest erect and shining hackle,
Resumes his interrupted wooing.
Imagine the resulting cackle !
For all the hens were at his feet.

This is the kind of thing that Fate enjoys.
A braggart victor works his own undoing ;
So if you win, don't make too big a noise.

## THE DAIRYMAID AND THE JAR OF MILK

(VII. 10)

*To K. A.*

ONE day the Dairymaid Perrette—
Upon her head a jar of earthenware
Firmly on its round cushion set—
Was hasting without thought of let
Or hindrance to the neighbouring fair.
Light and short-gowned she strode through dry and wet ;
For since she had no time to lose
She had chosen for the morning's wear
Sensible petticoat and flat-heeled shoes.
So on her way she reckoned out
The price her milk would fetch, and cast about
How she would spend it—bought a hundred eggs,
And hatched a chick from each—with care
Like hers, the scheme would soon be on its legs.
" I'll rear the hens in our backyard," thought she.
" However sharp the fox may be,
He'll leave enough to buy a pig.
The bran to fatten him won't ruin me—
(I bought him reasonably big).
Then I can sell him for a mint of money,
And seeing what he's worth, it will be funny
If I can't fix our stable with a cow
And calf—why, I can see them now,
Jumping about in Farmer's pens ! "

Suiting the action to the thought,
Perrette jumps too—and brings her hopes to naught.
Down goes the milk ; good-bye, cow, calf, pig, hens !
Their mistress, mournfully retreating
From the grim scene of the disaster,
Goes home to explain it to her lord and master,
In imminent danger of a beating.
*The Jar of Milk*—you know the play
Founded on the events of this unlucky day.

Castles in Spain, castles in Spain !
Who builds you not, though built in vain ?
Cynics and Stoics, Dairymaids and all,
Wise men and fools alike obey the call.
Each mortal has his waking dreams,
The dearest of his earthly joys,
When some sweet lie his soul bewitches,
And to his flattered sense he seems
Lord of the world and all its toys,
All its women, all its riches.
When I'm alone, I strut about the floor,
I shout defiance to the Sophy,
And bring his head home as a trophy ;
I'm chosen King, my peoples love me,
Crowns shower from the skies above me ;
But starting if a neighbour raps the door,
I'm still plain Mr. Pooter as before.

## THE CORPSE AND THE CLERGYMAN

(VII. 11)

*To A. V. M.*

A CORPSE in melancholy state
Was journeying to its last abode :
A Clergyman with cheerful gait
Was following along the road,
In haste to get the funeral over.
The Dead upon a hearse was borne,
Under a smooth and tidy cover,
Robed in that garment sad and strange
Which those poor derelicts forlorn
Change not although the seasons change.
The Parson, striding in his frock,
Mumbled his regulation stock
Of psalms, responses, verses, prayers,
Hymns, lessons, texts, and all his wares.
" Friend Dead," you seemed to hear him say,
" I could go on like this all day.
I warrant you shall have your fill,
Provided you can foot the bill."
He gloated on the bier with hungry eyes,
As though some thief might carry off the prize ;
And once again he seemed to say
" Friend Dead, I'll tell you what you have to pay,
Item candles, item cash,
Item sundries"—So he thought,

But ah ! the reckoning was rash.
Already in his mind he'd bought
A jolly flask of local wine,
And for his pretty niece a sash,
And for his cook a petticoat,
When, as his eyes began to shine
In rapture at the growing vision,
A corner's turned—there's a collision !
The Faithful in his coat of lead
Comes crashing on his Pastor's head,
And both together, hand in hand,
Set forth to seek the Other Land.

Alas ! for human hopes are brittle.
The Parson's dream and its frustration :
The Dairymaid's miscalculation :
These two display Man's fate in little.

## THE CAT, THE WEASEL, AND THE RABBIT

(VII. 16)

*To D. G.*

My Lady Weasel, one fine summer day,
Installed herself in Master Rabbit's lodging.
The youthful owner was away,
And she had watched the opportunity
(Full as she was of art and dodging)
To occupy it with impunity
And ample leisure to unpack
Before the rightful lord came back.
For he had run to bid the dawn
Good-morrow on a neighbouring lawn
Sweet with thyme and white with dew;
And there he sports the morning through,
Nibbling, hopping, jumping, skipping—
Then, homeward to his burrow tripping,
Spies at the window that long ugly muzzle.
"Well!" cries the Rabbit, "here's a puzzle!
Pray what might you be doing there?
By all the Gods of Hospitality,
I'll terminate this illegality!
Unless you pack off at the double,
Your Weaselship will be in trouble
With all the rats a mile from here."
Thereon the lady of the nose
Trots out her law: "You'll grant me, I suppose,

That land belongs to the first occupier ?
Besides, to put the case no higher,
A house you have to enter on your knees
Is a fine subject for a war !
And if they were a Kingdom, please
Enlighten me upon what score
You argue that these premises
Belong in perpetuity
To R, the son of A or B,
Rather than W, or me ? "

The Rabbit pleaded custom, use, and equity.
" 'Tis they," he said, " which makes this house my own,
Seeing that from the most remote antiquity
It has been handed down from sire to son,
Likewise inherited by son from sire.
That's better law than your first occupier,"
" Well," answered she, " enough of that,
Let's lay the case before Grimalkin."
" Ah ! " said the Rabbit, " now you're talking."

This was a much respected Cat
Who dwelt near by in sanctified tranquillity,
Well-liking, rich in fur and fat,
The type of feline venerability,
And famed for skill in arbitration.
Our couple sought his habitation.
" My children," he began, " come closer, pray ;
My hearing is no longer what it was,
And I can't catch a single word you say."

Suspecting naught, the parties to the cause
Approach his ear—the holy Brother,
Watching his moment, shoots a claw each way,
And makes their peace by crunching one and t'other.

This is a frequent state of things
When Princelings carry their disputes to Kings.

(VIII. 5)

*To Nat Madison*

WITH our importunate prayers we weary Heaven,
Often on themes too trivial even for Man,
As if the meanest of the mortal clan
Could keep Olympus busy eight days in seven,
And our infinitesimal velleities,
Each pettifogging grief or paltry joy,
Must be a burning question for the Deities
Like the old war between the Greeks and Troy.

A Fool, in bed, was bitten by a flea,
Which then in the creased blanket ran to earth.
" Hi ! Hercules ! you're wanted down," cried he,
" To slay this Hydra of a second birth.
What, Jupiter, is your protection worth,
If this vile beast can bleed me and go free ? "
To kill one flea, he'd borrow from above
Alcides' club and the forked levin of Jove.

## THE LARK AND THE FARMER

(IV. 22)

*To M. W.*

'T I S an old saying, that the Gods help those
Who help themselves ; and Æsop shows
Its application ; thus the story goes :—

Larks build their nests amid the corn
When its green blades are newly born,
In that sweet season when the whole round earth
Is one great festival of love and birth ;
Each race falls victim to the soft emotion
And to the procreant influence yields,
Blind monsters in the depth of ocean,
Tigers in forests, larks in fields.

A Lark woke up one morning to discover
She was behindhand—half the spring was over,
And she had not yet found a lover !
Straightway resolved to imitate the others
And join the happy band of mothers,
The needful business she despatches
At topmost speed, lays, sits, and hatches.
Her efforts were completely blest,
Save for one point : the corn around the nest
Had grown already to full height
Before the chicks were strong enough for flight.

The anxious mother, starting on her quest
For the day's nourishment, addressed
Instructions to the brood. " Keep watch," said she,
" And if, as I expect, you see
The Farmer and his son come round this way,
Listen most carefully to all they say.
If it is what I think, the time has come
For us to find another home."
Directly she had left the ground,
The Farmer and his son came round.
" These crops are ripe," said he, " and we must borrow
Some aid—go, ask our friends, at dawn to-morrow
To bring their scythes, and help us with the reaping."
When she came home, the chicks were cheeping
With fright, and one began : " He's sent a warning
To all his friends to come to-morrow morning. . . . "
" If that was all," said she, " we shall be keeping
Here for the present ; but to-morrow, dear,
Remember every word you hear—
It's most important. Now we'll sup,
And mind you keep your spirits up."
Soon the whole nest was calmly sleeping.
Dawn broke ; but of the friends, no trace.
The Lark flew off ; then, just the same
As yesterday, the Farmer came,
And seeing the crop still there, pulled a long face.
" Our friends," said he, " should feel much shame ;
But it is we who are to blame

For trusting such a lazy race.
Now go, my son, to our relations,
And ask them for their ministrations."
This time, the larklings were extremely fussed.
" O Mummy, his *relations !* now we *must* . . ."
" No, darlings, have your byebye out,
There's nothing in that to worry about."
The Lark was right ; for no one came at all.
Once more the Farmer paid his morning call.
" My son," he said, " how wrong we were
To put our confidence in others !
Our selves are our best friends and our best brothers.
Get that into your head, and keep it there ;
And now, d'you know the only thing to do ?
To-morrow morning, you and I,
And the entire family,
Must take our scythes, and never rest
Till we have got the harvest through."
At this, she was for once impressed.
" Now for the move," said she ; and every nestling,
Fluttering and flopping, jostling, wrestling,
Tumbled pell-mell out of the nest.

## CAT INTO LADY

(II. 18)

*To G.S.-C.*

THERE was a Man who owned a Cat.
He loved her to distraction. Hours he sat
Absorbed in admiration of her grace,
Her look of breeding, her expressive face—
Her very mew had quality!
He was as mad as mad could be.

And one fine day, by dint of supplications.
And tears, and charms, and incantations,
At last he induced a higher power
To change her into woman. That same hour,
Before the altar she was made his own.
Thereon his passion took a warmer tone.
Never did peerless beauty fire
Her suitor with more wild desire
Than this unprecedented spouse
Th' eccentric partner of her vows.
They spend their time in mutual coaxing,
He sees each day less trace of cat,
And lastly, hoaxed beyond all hoaxing,
Deems her sheer woman, top to toe—
Delusion could no further go.

But certain mice, who came to gnaw the mat,
Disturbed the couple in their evening chat.
Sudden, the wife goes tense and stiff—

They disappear—but soon, their eyes
Not penetrating her disguise,
Come creeping back. At the first whiff
She's off ; this time she takes them by surprise.
    Thenceforth all means were unavailing
To eradicate her little failing.

Such is the strength of our original bent.
Nothing deflects it. By a certain age,
A crease that can't be ironed out, a dent
That won't be levelled, stage by stage
Has marked us for our lives : in vain
To take another turn we strain—
Whether we call it God or Fate or Star,
Implacably, it keeps us what we are.
Whips and scorpions, brands and burns,
Leave it what it was before ;
If you drive it through the door,
By the window it returns.

(x. 13)

*To M. C.*

A SPORTSMAN trapped a Lioness's cub.
The frenzied mother in her grief
Set up a roaring past belief;
For miles around it shook each tree and shrub.
In vain did Night distil her soothing balm,
Her velvet darkness, and her silvery calm—
The din waxed louder as the hours went by,
And not an animal could close an eye.
" Dear Lady," said the Bear at last,
" The countless young who down your throat have passed,
Had they no fathers and no mothers ? "
" Of course they had." " But of the others,
However deep their sense of wrong,
Not one has split our heads in two.
If all those dams could hold their tongue—
Forgive the question—why can't you ? "
" I hold my tongue ? " she snarled, " unhappy me !
I've lost my child, I tell you, and I see
Nothing before me but a lone old age."
" But why ? Your case is not so desperate."
" Because I'm singled out by Fate,
Who dogs me with her special rage."

'Twas ever thus—a truth I would impress on

Each man who thinks, when common woes afflict him,
That he alone is Heaven's peculiar victim.
" What's Hecuba to him ? " An object-lesson !



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## JUNO AND THE PEACOCK

(II. 17)

*To Cathleen Nesbitt*

*Tous sont contents de leur Ramage*

The Peacock before Juno's throne
Raised a complaint in wrathful tone.
" Goddess," said he, " 'tis with just cause
That I impugn th' Olympian laws.
The voice you have allotted me offends
All Nature ; while the Nightingale,
A small and dowdy creature, with no tail
To speak of, from his tiny gullet sends
Such soft yet brilliant sound, that Spring rejoices,
As her chief glory, in that Voice of voices.
For such a wrong I claim amends."
The Queen was angered. " Jealous bird,"
She said, " speak not another word !
Is it for you to grudge a song—
For you, to whose proud neck belong
That silken rainbow's hundred hues,
Who strut about my avenues
Flaunting that gorgeous train of mingled fires
In which the jewelry of the world conspires ?
Is there a bird beneath the sky
More richly graced to please the eye ?
We have distributed the qualities

Among the creatures ; how should all have all ?
Some birds are eminent for strength and size,
The falcon swift, the ostrich tall,
The eagle brave, the raven wise,
The crow gives warning of disaster : each
Is seen contented with his proper speech.
Cease therefore your complaint ; if you renew it,
I'll have you plucked, and you'll rue it ! "

(x. 3)

*To V. B.-C.*

A Tortoise once, whose brain tho' weak was active,
Sick of her burrow, planned the world to roam.
Th' idea of Foreign Parts is so attractive,
And cripples easily grow bored with home.)
Two Ducks, to whom the would-be flier
Referred this laudable desire,
Made sure that they could satisfy her.
" We'll chariot you by air across th' Atlantic,"
They said. " You see how open lies the way ;
'Twill be no less instructive than romantic,
Visiting a fresh country every day,
Kingdoms, republics, manners, creeds and races,
Taking full notes of all the various places—
We can assure you, ma'am, you'll profit
By every single moment of it.
Ulysses did the same long since."
(Reader, you weren't expecting Mrs
Tortoise to be compared to Ulysses ?)
They found her easy to convince.
The bargain struck, the birds produce
A simple and ingenious trick
For the adventurous pilgrim's use :
Between her jaws they pass a stick,
(" Hold tight," they warned her—" don't let go ! ")

Each duck then grips an end, and lo !
Into the air the trio rise.
Picture the general surprise
On seeing the immense testacean
At such a startling elevation.
" A miracle ! " (such were the words
Rose to her hearing) " Lord support us,
Look if it isn't the Queen Tortoise
Up in the sky between two birds ! "
" The Queen," cries she, " yes, that's correct,
So mind you treat me with respect ! "
Alas, to speak at all was rash.
Her jaws unlocked, the stick flies out,
And down she tumbles with a crash.
'Twas her own folly brought her end about.

Imprudence and garrulity
And idle curiosity
And idiotic vanity
Are children of one family.

(II. 5)

*To L. L.*

A BAT, intent upon some evening quest,
Butted head-first into a Weasel's nest.
She, who 'gainst mice had borne a lifelong grudge,
Flared up : " Considering the harm your race
Has done to mine, how dare you show your face ?
Ugh, Mouse ! For mouse you are, if I'm a judge—
Deny it if you can." " A mouse ? Who, I ? "
Said the poor Bat, " Yes, that I do deny.
Gossips have put their heads together
To make you credit such a lie.
Thanks to the Father of all things,
I am a bird—you see my wings—
So here's three cheers for beak and feather ! "
The Weasel found her reasoning good,
And set her free to earn her livelihood.
Next week, our simple heroine
Approached, upon a fresh excursion,
Another Weasel's nest, and blundered in.
This time, 'twas birds that were the pet aversion ;
So here's her life at stake again.
The sharp-nosed dame dashed out in fury.
" Now that I've got you in my den
You won't escape me in a hurry,
G-r-r," she shrieks, " you ugly Bird ! "

The other deprecates th' invidious word.
" Don't call me names," she cried, " it's too absurd.
What is the one infallible sign
To tell a bird ? The feathers—where are mine ?
A mouse am I, three cheers for rats,
And Jupiter confound all cats ! "
By this ingenious repartee
Once more she gained her liberty.

It's always prudent in a time of strife
To have two coats of different dye,
And 'tis the wise man's rule of life
To suit his politics to his company,
And cheer both sides alternately.

(VII. 15)

*To Sir Douglas Hogg*

'T I S what the Public thinks, that sets the fashion,
And what it thinks is often due to chance.
Nothing we see but prejudice and passion,
Intrigue and obstinacy and ignorance ;
Of justice, little or none
Is found beneath the sun.
This could be proved from every class and calling ;
The cataract falls, and who can stay its falling ?
So it has ever been, and still shall be
To all eternity.

One year the town went crazy over
A dame who set up as a soothsayer.
Every occurrence was referred to her ;
Whether one lost a hanky or a lover,
Or had a rich old spouse who wouldn't die,
A jealous wife, or a vexatious mother,
Or any other little bother,
Off to the sorceress they'd hie
In hopes of guidance being granted
To do exactly as they wanted.
Her stock-in-trade was a quick wit,
A few cant phrases of astrology,
A brazen-faced audacity,

And now and then a lucky hit—
No wonder that her customers
Thought her the Queen of conjurers.
The oracle functioned in an attic ;
Into the till the money poured ;
And her success was so emphatic
That in a while she could afford
New business premises and a new house,
Likewise a government billet for her spouse.
Behold the attic occupied
By a fresh mistress. Still from far and wide
Women and girls, sparks young and old,
And every other sort beside,
Crowd in to have their fortunes told,
And cross the beldam's palm with gold.
Th' advertisement the former tenant gave
Had turned the garret to a Sibyl's cave.
The new one, spite of all that she should say,
Was forced to spout and prophesy away,
And incidentally to earn
More like two lawyers' fees than one.
" Well, well, you gentlemen will have your fun,"
She cries, " but I, who ne'er could learn
My letters even, why should I
Be thought the one to prophesy ? "
'Twas all in vain—they didn't care.
Her very setting awed the visitor's fancy ;
A cat, a broomstick, here and there

A rickety table or a groggy chair,
Gave the whole place a finished air
Of Witches' Sabbath and necromancy.
Had she foretold the truth all day
In chambers furnished in the usual way,
She would have failed—the garret was the draw.
The other woman pined away.

'Tis not uncommon in the Courts of Law
To see some shabby gown or wig
Draw fees astonishingly big.
The clients fancied that in him they saw
Some famous Counsel in enormous practice.
I can't explain it ; but the fact is,
*The trade-mark makes the business pay.*

## (III. 4)

*To Viscount Burnham*

THE Frogs, grown weary of democracy,
Kept plaguing Jove to change their constitution ;
And Jove at last, to stop the persecution,
Agreed to grant them an autocracy.
Down from the sky one day their Ruler flopped ;
And though in truth his nature was pacific,
The splash he made was so terrific
That every Frog incontinently hopped
To hide behind some reed or rush,
Or seek a bolt-hole in the slush.
A Frog's a silly, nervous thing ;
And for some days none dared go near their King ;
They took him for the Giant Gog,
Although he was, in point of fact, a Log.
The one who first picked up the pluck
To leave her shelter in the muck
And take a peep, was so much struck
With his grave air of stolid majesty,
That still she quaked ; but by and by
The others ventured, one by one,
And clustered, thick as ants, about the throne,
Till gradually growing bolder
They went the length of jumping on his shoulder ;
Yet even this impertinence

The good Prince suffered with indifference.
It was too much ! The Frogs went back to Jove,
And claimed a Monarch who at least could move.
The God, who found them getting on his brain,
Bestowed the office on a Crane,
Which with ferocious appetite
Gobbled them up from dawn till night.
The Frogs appealed once more—this time in vain.
" Learn," said th' Olympian, " 'tis not your place
To instruct me how to rule the terrene race.
It was your duty, first, to be content
With your original form of government,
And next to have been reconciled
To your old Sovereign, who was bland and mild ;
So now you must put up with what you've got,
For fear of a yet harsher lot."

## THE MOUNTAIN IN CHILDBED

(v. 10)

*To Maurice Baring*

A MOUNTAIN, in the pangs of birth,
Uttered a shriek that rent the earth ;
And everyone who heard the sound
Came rushing in from miles around,
Saying " No doubt within her womb she carries
A city twice the size of Paris."

When she lay in, a mouse came forth.

If I think upon this fable,
(Which, though untrue in point of fact,
Has yet a bearing most exact)—
I see an author at his table
Saying " I am about to sing
The war the Titans waged against Heaven's King."
It sounds extremely promising ;
But when the book comes out, what do we find ?
Mere wind.

(I. 5)

*To S. C.*

A WOLF was down to skin and bone,
(Those watchdogs did their work so well.)
He met a Mastiff, a tremendous swell,
Sleek, plump, and portly, on the road alone.
Here was a chance, to tear him limb from limb!
But no, he looked a nasty one to fight;
'Twere better, on the whole, to be polite;
So with a smirk the Wolf goes up to him,
And compliments him on his corporation,
And on the smoothness of his fur.
"You could be just as fat, good Sir,"
Said Towser, "if you left those plaguy woods
Where you poor devils pig it in starvation.
Just fancy, no fixed meals, no fire, no bed,
A constant fight for daily bread!
Come on, I'll help you find a situation,
Where you can have your share of this world's goods."
"Well," said the Wolf, "that sounds all right,
But pray what would my duties be?"
"Oh," said the Mastiff, "very light—
Just bark at any beggars you may see,
Or folk with crutches; suit the master's moods,
Be civil to his servants and his wife,
Play with the children—it's a scrumptious life:

Chicken-bones, pigeon-bones, no lack,
And lots of scratching on the back."
At such a prospect for his future years
The Wolf's eyes filled with wistful tears.
But as they ran, he spied a curious ring
Of bald white patch behind his comrade's ears.
" What's that ? " he asked with dawning fears.
" Nothing." " How so ? " " Well, hardly anything ;
The collar of my chain, may be,
Has been the cause of what you see."
" Your chain ! " exclaimed the Wolf, " then you're not
free
To run at will ? " " Not quite—but it don't matter."
" Don't it indeed ? It wouldn't do for me."
Replied the starveling. " You may be the fatter,
But I prefer my liberty
To all the riches of your platter."
He didn't pause to say Good-night,
But ran till he was out of sight.

(IX. 4)

*To Mrs. Asquith*

*De quoi faire à Margot pour sa fête un bouquet*

A DEVOTEE of gardening there was,
Between the peasant and the yeoman class,
Who on the outskirts of a certain village
Owned a neat garden, with a bit of tillage.
He made a quickset hedge to fence it in,
And there grew lettuce, pink, and jessamine,
Such as win prizes at the local show,
Or make a birthday bouquet for Margot.
One day he called upon the neighbouring Squire
To ask his help with a marauding hare.
" The brute," said he, " comes guzzling everywhere,
And simply laughs at all my traps and wire.
No stick nor stone will hit him—I declare
He's a magician." " Rubbish ! I don't care
If he's the Deuce himself," replied the other,
" I warrant he shan't give you much more bother.
Juno and Bruce, for all his cunning,
Won't take much time to get him running."
" But when ? " " To-morrow, sure as here I stand."
Next morning he rides up with all his band.
" Now then, we'll lunch ! those chickens don't look bad.
I hear your missus is a famous cook.
Ha ! there's your girl—come, child, let's have a look ;

Sit down by me—h'm, quite a beauty !
You bet she won't be long on hand.
I wonder who's the lucky lad ?
When will the bells ring ? Then's the time for dad
To come down handsome, if he knows his duty."
He fiddles with her kerchief, pats her cheek ;
" Oh, sir ! " says she, demurely meek ;
And Father, as he sees them chat,
Begins to wonder what they're at.
Meanwhile the kitchen hums with busy cooking ;
There's a delicious smell of stew.
" When did you cure those hams ? they're quite nice-looking."
" Sir, they are yours." " That's very good of you."
He makes a hearty meal ; so do the rest,
Dogs, horses, huntsmen, all with equal zest.
The Squire shouts orders, takes his liberties,
Drinks the host's wine, and gives his girl a kiss.
The luncheon over, all was preparation,
Bustle and buzz and animation,
Horns blowing, hounds barking, such a hullabaloo,
The good man feared the worst. His fear came true !
The kitchen-garden was a total wreck.
Under the trampling, not a speck
Of pot or frame survived. Good-bye
To onion, leek, and chicory,
Good-bye to marrows and their bravery,
Good-bye to all that makes soup savoury !

The hare meanwhile had sought retreat
Behind a giant head of beet.
The scent was good ; soon hounds and men
Are on him—but he's off again,
And makes the open, safe and sound,
Through a great hole—nay, through a gaping wound
Hacked by his Lordship's order in the fence
To let the horses through—of course the hunt
Could scarcely be expected to dismount !
The wretched owner saw no sense
In this grand style of doing things ;
But no one marked his mutterings.
The hounds and riders in a single trice
Had wrought more havoc in his paradise
Than all the hares in the vicinity
Could have achieved throughout infinity.

So far the story—now the moral :
Each petty Prince should settle his own quarrel.
If once he gets a King for an ally,
He's certain to regret it by and by.

## THE JESTER AND THE LITTLE FISHES

(VII. 8)

*To D. C.*

SOME people like professional wits :
I don't—a joke falls flat unless it soars,
And funny men who muff their hits
Were made by Heaven to punish other bores.
Here is a specimen ; mayhap
There's someone who'll put on the cap.

A Wag was dining with a wealthy friend.
The servants only brought him little fishes ;
And seeing the large ones in the distant dishes,
He laid a scheme to get them to his end.
Up on his fork he took the tiny fry,
Then whispered in their ears, and after that
Feigned to be listening to their reply.
The guests all wondered what he could be at.
Having thus gained th' attention of the table,
He told them in a serious tone
How for some time he'd felt uncomfortable
About a friend who years agone
Had started for the Indian Ocean
And not been heard of since. " I had a notion,"
Said he, " that these small gentry might be able
To give me news of him ; but it appears
That owing to their tender years

They can't—although they think the grown-up fishes
Could very likely meet my wishes.
Might I with one of those confabulate ? "
I don't know how the company
Relished this curious pleasantry ;
But anyhow, they set upon his plate
A monster old enough to tell
The names of all th' adventurers
Who for at least a hundred years
Towards unknown continents had set their helms,
And sunk beneath the tide that whelms,
In the blind depths unfathomable,
The veterans of the watery realms.

## THE FLY ON THE WHEEL

(VII. 9)

*To Mary Borden*

UP a rough road, steep, parched, and thick with sand,
And to the sun exposed on every hand,
Six stalwart horses drag a coach.
They sweat, they pant, they're almost at a stand ;
Women—old men—a curate—all get out
To ease the load. Behold a fly approach,
And round the horses buzz about
To prick them to a further bout.
She settles on the shaft, the coachman's nose,
And does in very truth suppose
That it is she who makes the wheels go round.
Whene'er they gain an inch of ground,
And one step onward the procession goes,
She feels the credit to herself redound,
Hustles and bustles in wherever
She sees a chance her horn to sound.
A sergeant on a field of war
In time of stress could do no more
To urge his men to fresh endeavour.
She next complains that though in fact
Th' emergency affects them all,
She is the only one to act,
Alone she answers to the call,
And keeps the horses from a fall.

The curate had his prayer-book in his hand :
How he could read, she couldn't understand.
A woman hummed an air : a curious choice
Of an occasion to show off her voice !
In all their ears in turn my lady buzzes,
And makes a thousand foolish fusses.
After long toil, the coach surmounts the crest.
" Good ! " says the Fly, " Here we can take a rest.
Our task is ended, thanks to me—
Now, my fine horses, where's my fee ? "

These useless folk who love to interfere,
And under cover of unselfish zeal
Poke in their noses everywhere,
Should ruthlessly be sent to heel.

## THE TWO FRIENDS

(VIII. 12)

*To M. H.*

IN Monomotapa the blest
Two friends there were, of friends the best.
Whatever either had, it was the other's ;
In all ways they were more than brothers.
Friendship's a different thing, it seems,
In that far country of our dreams.

One night, when all the world was busy sleeping
And duly making hay while the moon shone,
One of our pair woke with a start, and leaping
Out of his bed, huddled his garments on,
Ran to his friend's house, pealed upon the bell,
(For Sleep had on the threshold laid his spell).
Roused by the noise, the other reaches for
His purse and sword, and hurries to the door.
" How now ? " he cries, " 'twas never known before
That you should walk when everyone's abed.
I thought you knew a better use for night !
You've lost too much at gaming—am I right ?
Here's gold. . . . A quarrel ? Are you off to fight ?
I'm armed—we'll go at once." He shook his head.
" Then you were tired of sleeping all alone ?
A slave was by my side—a pretty one—
I'll send her to you." " No," the other said,

" Your goodness puts me quite to shame ;
But all you guess is wrong. I dreamed
I saw you, and you seemed
Unhappy—fearing it was true, I came ;
That cruel dream must bear the blame."

Which of them loved the better ? Reader, say.
The question might be argued either way.
But what a treasure is a faithful friend !
To please your heart is all his end ;
And how, he need not painfully enquire ;
His own heart teaches him your heart's desire ;
And even a dream can rouse his fear,
If it but touches what he holds so dear.

## THE CROW AND THE FOX

(I. 2)

*To C. A.*

A Crow sat perched upon an oak,
And in his beak he held a cheese.
A Fox snuffed up the savoury breeze,
And thus in honied accent spoke :
" O Prince of Crows, such grace of mien
Has never in these parts been seen.
If but your voice be half as good,
You are the Phœnix of the wood ! "
The Crow, beside himself with pleasure,
And in his vanity intent
On meriting the compliment,
Opened his beak, and dropped his treasure.
The Fox was on it in a trice.
" Learn, sir," said he, " that flatterers live
On those who swallow what they say.
A cheese is not too much to give
For such a piece of sound advice."
The Crow, ashamed to have been such easy prey,
Swore, though too late, he shouldn't catch him twice.

(II. 14)

*To F. H.*

A HARE lay musing in his form ;
For in a form, what can one do but muse ?
The timorous beast was cowering in the blues,
Such countless perils seemed in th' air to swarm.
" Oh, 'tis a pitiful condition,"
Thought he, " to have a nervous disposition.
One cannot take a single bite
With a good healthy appetite ;
No pleasure pure, no flank secure,
On every hand some fresh surprise,
Such is my life ; thanks to this constant fright,
Even when I sleep I daren't shut both my eyes.
' Then cure yourself,' some wiseacre will say.
Cure Fear, indeed ! I wish he'd show the way.
I shouldn't be amazed to hear
That Men themselves, like me, are slaves to Fear."
Such were our poor friend's cogitations,
And all the while his ear was cocked ;
He was a prey to small hallucinations ;
By every flickering shade and puffing wind
His shy uneasy mind
Was all perturbed and shocked.
So while he dreamed he heard a rustle,
And took the hint to bustle

Off to his bolt-hole. As he passed a lake,
Down to the edge the Frogs went hopping,
Down to their watery grottoes plopping.
" Oho," said he, " then I can make
Others afeared as I'm afeared,
And at my footstep armies quake !
Look, how they fled when I appeared !
So there are beasts who tremble before me ;
There *is* a walk I'm cock of ! Well, I see,
No such poltroon in all the world can be
But somewhere there's a worse poltroon than he."

## (VIII. 2)

*To The Duke of Devonshire.*

THERE was a Cobbler sang from dawn till night.
To hear him was a sheer delight,
Trilling right up the scale and down again,
As happy as the Seven Wise Men.
His neighbour in the house next door,
Who owned a million francs or more,
Sang very little, and slept still less,
Being, as he was, a Business Man.
If sometimes, just as day began,
He dozed into unconsciousness,
The singing woke him, loud and bold ;
And he would often think it strange
That Providence should not arrange
Some simple method to exchange
Slumber, like food and drink, for gold.
One day, from curiosity,
He asked his neighbour for a visit.
" Now tell me, Master Gregory,
Your yearly income—how much is it ? "
" Income ! " said t'other with a grin,
" Why, Sir, that's not the way I count !
I can't afford to crack my wits
With adding up each day's amount.
I just hang on, day out, day in,

And look upon it as a win
If at New Year I find I'm quits."
" Well then, just tell me what you earn a day."
" There's ups and downs—it isn't bad, my pay.
The only trouble is, some plaguy feast
Keeps cropping up to take my work away.
One cuts the other's throat ; and our good priest
(To brighten up his sermons, I should say)
Invents a new saint once a week at least."
The Banker smiled at his simplicity.
" Just for to-day, my friend," said he,
" I'm going to put you on a throne.
You see these hundred crowns—they are your own,
So keep them safe against a rainy day."
Here was a shock for eyes and ears !
The Cobbler, dazzled to behold
What he supposed was all the gold
Dug up in the last hundred years
To serve the nations, runs home all the way,
And hides his treasure deep in earth—
But with it, all his former mirth.
From that day forth he sings no more ;
His voice is gone, now he possesses
The primal cause of Man's distresses.
Sleep flies him too, and leaves his door
Open to vain imaginings,
And doubts, and fears of harmless things.
All daytime he's on guard, and in the dark,

If a cat mew or a dog bark,
Why, that must be the burglars ! In the end
He hies him back to his too generous friend
(Who now quite undisturbed by song
Might doze all day and all night long),
And pours the money in his lap.
" Restore," he cries, " my ditties and my nap,
And keep your hundred crowns where they belong."

(v. 18)

*To C. S.*

THE Eagle and the Screeching Owl
Composed their quarrel, and were cheek by jowl.
The former swore his Kingly oath,
The latter her Palladian troth,
To do no mischief to each other's broods.
" Do you know mine by sight ? " the Owl enquires.
" No ! " said the Eagle. " That's too bad," says t'other :
It seems I'm an unlucky mother.
I know too well your royal moods
And irresponsible desires ;
For Kings, like Gods, abuse their high position,
And take small thought for those of less condition ;
So if my dear ones come your way,
I fear 'twill prove their dying day."
" Then tell me what they're like," said he, " or show them ;
I promise they shall take no harm."
" Good ! " answered she ; " I'll teach you how to know
them.
The darlings have a quite peculiar charm,
Such beauty, such engaging little tricks,
There's no mistaking them for common chicks ;
You can't go wrong ; so I implore you
To keep this picture clear before you."
Next season, sure enough, the Owl was blest

With issue ; and the Eagle found the nest
One evening when in search for food.
('Twas in a hole of rock or tree
Or wall, or some such cavity.)
The niche contained a hideous brood
Of horrid little cross hobgoblins,
Filling the air with screams and squabblings.
After a glance, " Well, anyhow," said he,
There's one thing certain : these can't be
The paragons depicted by my friend.
Let's crunch 'em." With one crunch he made an end.
(There's nothing light about an eagle's dinner.)
The Owl's return was sad : of all her sweet
Young family, she only found the feet !
And her complaint was loud against the sinner,
Calling the wrath of Heaven on that foul thief
To whom she owed her grief.
Someone who heard her said :
" Their blood is on your head—
Unless we blame that law of Nature
Which has ordained that every creature
Shall think his kind the pattern of perfection,
And formed for general predilection.
You sketched that portrait for the King—
Now, was it like them in the smallest thing ? "

## THE CANDLE'S MISTAKE

(IX. 12)

*To P. L.*

'T WAS in the flowery courts of Jove
That the first bees first sought their treasure-trove ;
And thence, men say, they flew to that fair hill
Hymettus, there to sup their fill
Of sweets the Zephyrs in the thyme distil.
But soon came those who forced their citadels,
And filched th' ambrosia from their secret cells :
Or, to speak plainer, in their thievish packs
Carried the honey off, and left the wax.
'Tis to this date historians have assigned
The rise of candles, dips, and all their kind.

A Taper, marking how an earthen brick,
Once hardened by a course of firing,
Could last for ever, and aspiring
To the same state, resolved to essay the trick ;
So, like a new Empedocles,
Leaping into the grate, the luckless tolly,
By his own crass, misguided folly,
Ended as a pool of grease—
All through ignorant defiance
Of the simplest laws of Science.

No two things are alike ; let none presume
That on the earth it has a true twin-brother.
Our wax Empedocles the flames consume—
He's not much madder than the other.

## THE MONKEY AND THE LEOPARD

(IX. 3)

*To Mrs. Patrick Campbell*

THE Monkey and the Pard, at all the fairs,
Each from his booth, cried up their rival wares.
" Step in, step in," the Leopard said,
" Ladies and Lords, my fame is spread
Among the highest in the land.
When lately by the King's command
I went to Court, His Majesty
Bespoke a muff, against I die,
Cut from my tawny coat all gemmed and dotted,
Stippled and dappled, pipped and spotted
And mooned and starred with ebony ! "
Motley has charms—the crowd poured in to gaze ;
But soon they had their fill, and went their ways.
In the next booth, " Now, people," cried the Ape,
Walk up, and see the Prince of jest and jape !
We've heard a lot about variety ;
My neighbour has it on his outer skin—
But that's the kind that breeds satiety—
While mine's a spiritual grace within.
My family's the best in Christendom,
Hereditary Monkeys to the Pope ;
And here by special train I come,
Your servant Jacko, in the hope
Simply to have a chat with you,

And show you how I walk the rope,
And jump the hoop, and loop the loop,
And dance, and play the fiddle too—
All for a tizzy—nay, a penny !
Come up, step lively, Jack and Jenny,
And if you don't all stay and ask for more,
We'll give you back your money at the door."

'Tis with the Monkey I agree,
For wits, not clothes, can dazzle me ;
One glance at a rich suit suffices,
But wit has endless fresh devices.
Yet, like the Pard, how many a noble lord
Wears all his talent in his cape and sword !

(VII. 3)

*To E. D.*

An old Rat, grown world-weary, (so a sage
Told me in the Levant) sought for a hermitage
Where he might leave all mundane cares behind.
He chose his spot within the rind
Of a desirable Dutch cheese,
Where, meditating in security
And solitude upon futurity,
He meant to end his days at ease.
Thereout our novel hermit scoops and gnaws,
With a few days' hard work for teeth and paws,
Commodious quarters, which afford,
In happy combination, bed and board.
He prospered and grew fat—the due reward
Of dedication to the Lord.

One day the Saint received a Deputation
Sent to their allies by the Rattish nation
In quest of military aid.
The Cats had made a warlike demonstration—
Ratopolis was threatened with blockade.
They had no money on them, the contingency
Having surprised them at a time of stringency ;
So for their journey they required a loan
Which should be punctually repaid,
As it was certain that the town

Must be immediately relieved ;
And any help, however slight,
Would be most thankfully received.
" My friends," replied the anchorite,
" The things of earth are no concern of mine.
A poor recluse, what power have I
To succour your necessity,
Save to commend you to the grace divine ?
You have my prayers—I can no more."
And with these words he shut the door.

Whom, pray, can I be aiming at
In this curmudgeonly old Rat ?
A Monk ? Good Heavens, no—you're too malicious !
I meant a Bonze—no Monk is avaricious.

(VIII. 6)

*To N. L.*

A SECRET is a heavy load ;
Most women drop it on the road ;
(And in this matter 'tis uncommon
To find a man who's not a woman.)

One night in bed, to test his wife,
" Help ! " cried a husband, " Save my life !
What *is* this pain ? Those pangs again . . .
Look ! If I haven't laid an egg ! "
" An egg ? " " Yes, there, beside my leg,
New-laid and white. Don't breathe a word
To living soul of what you've heard.
I couldn't face my fellow men—
I should be called the Laying Hen ! "
The dame, to whom the case was new
(As many other things were too)
Was gulled, and swore by book and candle
Never to divulge the scandal :
A promise doomed to fade away
At the first glimmering of day,
When, weak in brains as in discretion,
She ups and runs across the way
To make her crony the confession.
" Oh, Mrs. Robinson," she cries,

" You'll never guess . . . such a surprise !
John's laid an egg, four times life-size—
He'll beat me if you tell a creature,
So do for Heaven sake keep it mum."
" Ah ! " said the other, looking wise,
" How little do you know my nature !
Depend upon me to be dumb."
Relieved, the Layer's wife returns.
The neighbour's heart within her burns
Until she can the news repeat
To every gossip in the street,
Making the egg not one, but three.
The next said four, and whispered low :
A caution hardly needed now,
The secret having ceased to be.
From mouth to mouth, by Rumour's power,
The tale of eggs grew more and more ;
Till that same day, by sunset hour,
The number was at least five score.

(IX. 14)

*To V. Sackville-West*

WITH pious looks, a Fox and a Tom-Cat,
Each with a pilgrim staff and hat,
Set out together on their way,
And as they went they seemed to pray ;
Though a more precious pair of rank impostors
Never intoned their Paternosters.
For their expenses they recouped themselves
With spoil from henroosts and from dairy-shelves,
And when the road seemed long and weary
An argument would keep them cheery—
(Discussion is the only way
To stay awake on a hot day.)
They talked philosophy till all was blue,
Then scandal ; that exhausted too,
The Fox began : " Although you never
Think anybody else is clever,
Compared with me you're a beginner.
My bag holds fifty tricks, all superfine."
" Well," said the Cat, " there's only one in mine,
But I maintain that it's a winner."
Hammer and tongs the back-chat starts again,
Till hushed by a great noise of hounds and men.
" Now for your bag," says Tabby, " now's the time
To rack that subtle brain for some sublime

Invention—this one's good enough for me."
So saying, he bounded up a tree
Into complete security.
The other starts to dodge and veer and tack,
Here there and everywhere and back,
Bolts down a hundred holes and out again,
Contrives for many an anxious hour to strain
The whole resources of the veteran pack.
Alas, 'twas all in vain !
Smoke and the terriers played their mutual role ;
And when he popped his head from the last hole
No hope was left ; an ambushed hound
Was on him at a single bound.

To have too many plans is a delusion ;
It tends to overstraining and confusion ;
So have one only, but be sure 'tis sound.

## THE OBSEQUIES OF THE LIONESS

(VIII. 14)

*To Edmund Gosse*

ONE day King Lion's consort died.
At once the news flew far and wide.
You can imagine with what zeal,
Each treading on another's heel,
The creatures crowded to deplore
Th' event, and pay those compliments of course
Which make bereavement such a bore.
An ordinance was put in force
Fixing the venue and the date
Of the Queen's burial in state ;
And all the mammal world was there.
The Chamberlains were everywhere,
Ranging the mourners in their places
And managing the pomps and graces.
The Monarch's moanings filled the air,
And roused the echoes of the lair
Which did him duty as a temple.
The courtiers followed his example,
Each roaring in his own vernacular.

And, by the way, what copiers courtiers are !
Ready for anything, though pleased by none ;
With equal zest for every form of boredom
Which their bored sovereign's changeful moods afford 'em.

How like an ape or a chameleon
Each vies with each to catch His mood and tone !
A thousand bodies moved by one desire ?
Rather, a thousand puppets on one wire.

But to return to our affair—
In the Stag's eyes alone no tears were seen.
How could he weep ? The Queen
Had in her day strangled his wife and child ;
Her death was his revenge. A flatterer
Goes whispering to the King, and adds : " *He smiled !* "
The poor Stag was no reader ; had he been,
He might have learnt from Solomon how rude
Is a King's wrath—King Lion's worst of all.
An awful silence filled the hall.
Then roared the Prince : " Mean skulker in the wood !
Thou smil'st ? Thou followest not this mourning multitude ?
Think not that on thy members vile
We will our sacred claws defile.
Up, Wolves ! Up, Hounds ! Avenge the Queen,
And of those treasonable limbs be made
An offering to her royal Shade ! "
" Sire," said the Stag, " the hour for tears hath been.
Grief is henceforth a superfluity.
But now, thy gracious Consort have I seen
Couched in yon flowery glade.
I could not be mistaken—it was She !

' Friend,' ('twas her word) ' let not this funeral train,
Which bears me to the Gods, draw tears from thee :
Such joys surround me on th' Elysian plain,
Saint among Saints, in heavenly company.
Let not my Lord his grief too soon resign ;
It gives me pleasure.' " !
All those mouths uplift
Great shouts of joy : " A miracle ! " " A sign ! "
The Stag received, not torture, but a gift.

Illusion is the meat and drink of Kings.
Ply them with pleasant lies, you'll gain your end.
When they boil up, say a few flattering things—
They'll gobble down the bait, and call you friend.

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